

# **LONDON LEAD COMPANY, BARGAINS AND PAYMENTS IN THE ALSTON AND TEESDALE DISTRICTS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The records of the Governor and Company indicate that there were four main methods of payment for workers in lead mines.

1. Wages paid at daily or weekly rate. They were the joiners, smiths, stonemasons and engine wrights; Matthew Robson was paid a weekly rate of 9s for smith work at Scaleburn mine during the period 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1798 to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1799.<sup>1</sup>
2. By the Fathom. Miners engaged in Dead work, driving shafts, levels, sumps and rises were paid by the fathom for example Hugh Spotswood for the period 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1798 to 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1799 was paid 70s per fathom for driving in the Rampgill mine; he received £70 for driving 20 fathoms.
3. By the Bing of dressed/washed Ore. The men and some women<sup>2</sup> that worked the ore were paid a previously agreed price per Bing of ore (Bing = 8 cwt.); at Rampgill mine in 1798 William Blalock partnership was paid 27s a Bing of washed/dressed ore.
4. By the Ton of dressed/washed Ore. Payment of miners by the Ton of washed Ore, Joseph Thompson and partners received 75/- per Ton of dressed ore at Smallcleugh mine in 1797. Thomas Dodd in his report of 16<sup>th</sup> April 1808 stated that he had reduced the highest bargain prices with difficulty to 42/- per Bing and £11 5s per Ton.

There were also bargains which combined both Fathom and Bing rates. At Thortergill Sun Vein, 2nd March 1768:

*“John Bell & Partners to drive in their present forehead if they please till Lady Day next at 20/- a Fathom, & 15/- per Bing for what ore they Raise in Driving or in any other part of the ground they have cut.”*

When looking at the bargain rates it must be remembered that the miners had to pay for the gunpowder, candles, the cost of drawing the ore out of the mine and also the washing/dressing of the ore to make it ready for smelting, as well as the tools they used, although Company paid for maintenance of them, sharpening etc.<sup>3</sup>

## **COUNTERACTING ABUSE OF CHARGES TO MINERS**

These charges to the miners were open to abuse by unscrupulous Agents. The Court tried to address this by passing regulations preventing their agents from being involved in the sale of Gunpowder, candles, nor to be allowed to be involved in the drawing of ore from the mines. The Court Minutes of 10<sup>th</sup> September 1784 (LLC 13a) record:—

*“That no agent be permitted to deal in any commodity made use of by the miners or smelters, nor that they be permitted to be concerned underhandedly with any person who shall deal in such goods, nor be concerned in Whimseys or letting horses to draw wagons, or wood, or anything of that kind for the Company; and if the salaries we now pay are not sufficient the Company to allow them what is equivalent.”*

Following complaints regarding the behaviour of Thomas Dodd the Company Agent the Court of 6<sup>th</sup> December 1810 (LLC 17) the following Resolutions were passed:—

- *That no gunpowder be used by the Company's workmen but what is furnished by order of the Court and be charged to them at prime cost with only the addition of freight and carriage.*
- *That the candles be purchased upon the best terms, paid for quarterly and charged in the same manner as the gunpowder.*
- *That in letting of bargains no person whatever shall have a hireling employed on any account in the Company's works except a workman who may fall sick and has taken a bargain previous to his sickness and he shall only be allowed this till that bargain is finished.*
- *That for engaging of Whimsey or Level Horses used by the Company, notice to be given to the parties letting the same for receiving proposals for yearly contract; the proposals to be given under seal and forwarded to the Superintendent.*
- *That the store keeper shall keep a correct record of ... wood, rope, iron, gunpowder, candles and other stores; keeping a similar account of the same, making a distinct account of what is to be reckoned for with the workmen from what is paid for by the Company.*
- *That no Agent, Clerk, or assistant, or any party on their behalf shall have any concern, directly or indirectly, in selling gunpowder, candles, or any other material used in the Company's Mines, or be concerned in the Corn Trade, or in the sale of shop goods to the Company's workmen, or any others, either directly or indirectly.*
- *That no Agent, Clerk, or assistant, or any party on their behalf shall have any Mine or shares of Mine, or be concerned either in Mine adventuring, or in the purchase of Ore, directly or indirectly, or in any shape whatever ...*
- *Coals and Candles are not allowed to any Agent or otherwise.*

Following meetings in London with Robert Stagg & Thomas Dodd the Court of 7<sup>th</sup> March 1812 reiterated these resolutions with the interesting addition of:

*"That every charge against the workmen for drawing work, tools, crushing mills etc. as well as advances, candles, gunpowder's be passed through the due papers, and no part to be reckoned or taken off them in any other way whatsoever."*

In 1815 Robert Stagg introduced a system by which the Company took over the drawing of Ore from the Mines using their own horses, in Alston this was still done by Contractors, the new system was later adopted in Alston and a letter of 8<sup>th</sup> February 1819, commented on the savings made in the Alston mines by doing so, in 1820 this was extended to all the Company mines. In 1843 this decision was reversed and tenders were to be taken in lieu of doing this work with their own horses.

## **SETTING THE PRICE OF BARGAINS**

The miners were organised into partnerships and they entered into bargains with the mine owner or his agent; the price paid depended on the difficulty of the ground and the current price and demand for ore. The aim of keeping bargain prices closely related to lead prices can be seen in the minutes of Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1793:—

*"Report of the Committee of mines to the Court.*

*"Your committee of mines upon examining the sales of lead and bargains let, observe that in 1785 lead sold from £15 17s 6d to £16 5s per Fother and bargains let 25s, 26s, and 27s per Bing. In 1787 lead sold for £19 and £20 per Fother, the bargains they let for 28s and 30s per Bing.*

*"It appears that in 1785 some of these bargains were let by Robert Stagg previous to the appointment of Thomas Dodd after the discharge of Robert Percival. In the year 1788 (very unexpectedly) lead rose to the astonishing price of £23 per Fother, then the miners took advantages and rose the bargains to 35s, 38s, and 40s per Bing in the years 1789 and 1790. The lead market has considerably fallen from £17 and £16. Though your agents had not lowered the bargains in proportion for 35s and 30s. Thomas Dodd has had some consideration at the fallen state of the lead market by lowering the bargains since Ladyday 1793 about 3s per Bing, he has not nearly reduced the bargains to the same as they were in the years 1785 and 1786, when lead sold at the same prices nearly as this year £16 10s.*

*"It may be justly observed by the Court that this ought to be done, but we fear that there will be some difficulty in accomplishing that object, though it is the duty of the Court to attempt it, but it is worth considering whether the Company's should strain it a shade upon the eve of perhaps a severe winter. We recommend the Court to acquaint their Agent Thomas Dodd of the above statement and bargains let in the year 1785 and 1786 ordering him at the same time to lower them as near as possible to the present state of the lead market, to make himself acquainted and inform the Court at what price Blackett's and other considerable mining adventurers in the county let their bargains at this time."*

In 1799 to 1800 due to steep rise in food prices the agents of the London Lead Company were instructed to relate bargain rates to the cost of food rather than just the price of lead. In the court minutes of Friday 30<sup>th</sup> January 1800 Thomas Dodd assured the court that the price of lead had no influence on the price of bargains, but that when lead sold high it afforded a fair opportunity of employing some men in old workings which could not be wrought when ore was cheap. The bargains were let at present so as to produce the men 12s per week in consequence of the high price of provisions instead of 10s, which is the customary wage. It was also the case that when food prices declined so did the rate paid to the miners as is made clear in Robert Stagg's Michaelmas 1817 report:—

*"As there is every reason to calculate upon grain being at moderate prices during the winter I have ventured to make a further reduction of 1s a week on all the wagemen's rates. I have also made an additional reduction in the bargain rates."*

The bargain was effectively a system of payment by results and it greatly reduced the degree of risk taken by the Company, if little ore was found the payments to the miners would also be small. This method of using the miners spirit of adventure in order to explore new ground cheaply can be seen in the Teesdale report<sup>4</sup> of Robert Stagg to the court in Midsummer 1818:—

*"The Bargain let to George Hardy at 60/- per Bing is to explore the whole ground lying between the second shaft from the Low level mouth, and Binks sump, where little or no ore has hitherto been found. If he succeeds in his trial, which however is not expected it will open out a great extent of new ground that will be advantageous to the Company, and if he fails it will at any rate be a satisfactory trial made without loss. By a little additional price in cases of this nature men are induced to make trials that frequently lead to very excellent mines one existing proof of which is the Rampgill Sun Vein in Alston Moor now working to such uncommon advantage and which was discovered by a partnership who were led to make the trial from the extra encouragement which I held out to them in this way and without any expectation on the part of either themselves or any agents of a very successful result.*

*“I therefore systematically encourage this spirit of speculation and adventure among the workmen as it may and often does do much good to the Company without the possibility of doing any harm whatsoever.”*

There were instances of men who having made a bargain failing to continue working it and this is reflected in the Court minutes of 16 September 1805 when it was said, “Magistrates compel the miners to complete their bargains”.

It was also the policy to give high bargain prices in order to encourage miners to work in very poor ground as can be seen in the report of Christmas 1817<sup>5</sup>:—

*“The pickings in all the districts are very poor from having been so much wrought during the last two or three years. I am therefore obliged to give a little more price for them and even at the rates at which these Bargains are let the workmen will rarely make more than 10/- per week where the highest prices are given. I am more and more satisfied of the advantage of encouraging the pickings as much as possible for at 50/- per Bing there is now an abundance of profit as the Court will see by the annexed statement and the trials made by the workmen in this way lead frequently to the discovery of very advantageous mines besides affording employment to a multitude of men who would otherwise be destitute of work and of the means of supporting their families.”*

***“Statement of the Cost of Lead per Fother when delivered at Stella which is raised in the pickings at 50/- per Bing.***

Cost of raising 5 Bings of Ore (which exclusive	£	s	d
of Duty will produce one Fother of lead) at 50/- per Bing	12	10	0
Wood used in raising the 5 Bings of ore computation			
say at very most		10	0
Carriage of 4 Bings to the Mill say 3/- per Bing		12	0
Smelting per Fother being the average cost	1	0	9
Lead Carriage per Fother on the average say	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
	15	3	9
Deduct gain by Refining on the average say on a			
moderate computation		<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
which leaves as the total cost when delivered to Stella	£14	8	9

Before giving the bargains, it was the agents’ job to examine the mines in order to determine what prices to give.

## THE AGENTS ROLE IN SETTING BARGAINS

Robert Bainbridge in 1864<sup>6</sup> described the method of setting the price of bargains used by the Lead Company. It was done on the basis that the men would earn 15s a week clear for five eight hour shifts; but that the basis varied according to the state of the times, and according to the price of provisions. The value of the ground was done by sending:

*“not fewer than five agents to each working, throughout the whole of the mines; and generally speaking, I have two sets of five agents going on with their view at the same time, and that is done with the object of saving time of the men. Formerly one set of agents used to view all the mines, and it took them a fortnight to complete their work in this district; but for some years past, instead of having one set of agents going I have had two sets to view, and we are able to accomplish all our bargain arrangements*

*within a week. As a general rule the men do not work at the time that the view is going on."*

These agents he explained came from, Teesdale, Alston Moor, Weardale and from Westmoreland, these groups were mixed so that:

*"in that way all possibility of partiality, and all possibility of any improper dealing between the local men and the miners is prevented. To each of these parties I give the basis of the wages upon which they are to give their opinion, so as to bring out the net earnings of 15s a week to each man, for five eight hour shifts of free and skilful exertion. Then having that basis, each of those parties goes to a mine and views the place, and considers what the rate ought to be for the bargain, and he enters that in his own book or sheet, which he delivers to me independently of his fellows."*

This system had been in place for the previous half century, and he believed that both the masters and the men were thoroughly satisfied. He also stated that the results generally came out very closely to the approximate basis that he had given.

The system also encouraged the miners to work hard which may not have been the case if they were waged. In a group of resolutions voted by the Court of the London Lead Company in 1810<sup>7</sup> was:—

*"That as few wagemen as possible be employed, but that in every instance where it can be accomplished, the work to be done by the Piece, of what nature soever."*

These resolutions also stated that no bargain was to be made for more than three months, and that no partnership may hire a worker to work their bargain (a similar resolution had previously been passed on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1805). The reason for this resolution was mainly because it was the opinion of the Court that a waged miner was unlikely to work as hard as someone working a bargain for themselves; this was also the attitude of the Beaumont Mine Company as well.

The numbers of men in a partnership varied but most were of 4 to 8 men; and every partnership had to declare its members at the time of the bargain. Larger partnerships of ten or twelve men were employed only at driving a level or shaft where speed was essential.

## **CHANGES TO WORKING METHODS**

In the Midsummer report of 1816<sup>8</sup> Robert Stagg stated that it was economically better that a horse level should be close to the ore workings in order that the large size partnerships could be reduced. They could then work at lower prices, as most of their time would be spent getting ore rather than transporting ore and deads over long distances; the large partnerships had used much of their labour force in transporting ore and deads over a long distance by hand. He was referring to Middlehope mine Weardale:

*"The prospects of this mine are very favourable but the chief workings having being pushed forwards upwards of 20 fathoms before the drawing level, from an improper anxiety on the part of Thomas Dodd, to raise a great quantity of ore, they were all working to great disadvantage, and in consequence the men have been taken out of them and employed in the Old pickings until the level gets sufficiently forward to enable us to prosecute these leading workings to the greatest advantage; which has necessarily occasioned a greater number of Bargains to be let at a higher prices this quarter than formally. But although the present appearance is thereby rendered unfavourable the company will eventually be greater benefited by the reduced rates at*

*which these places now standing will work. To give the Court some idea of the state of the workings discontinued I directed the Agents, in their inspection of the mine to view them and report to me the price at which they would work after the level in question is got up, and by partnerships of 4 men instead of the large partnerships of 8 or 10 men recently working them, and their report is as follows”.*

*Working where 10 men have been employed at 23s per Bing will work at 15s per Bing*

“	“	10	“	“	“	“	“	25s	“	“	“	“	“	18s	“	“
“	“	8	“	“	“	“	“	25s	“	“	“	“	“	21s	“	“
“	“	6	“	“	“	“	“	30s	“	“	“	“	“	25s	“	“
“	“	6	“	“	“	“	“	23s	“	“	“	“	“	18s	“	“

*“Some part of this enormous difference of the price is owing to the improvement of the mines, but they all agree that the intended method of working this mine just stated will be a saving upon the average of at least 4s a Bing, which upon the quantity that will annually be raised from the working will amount to not less than £40 per year. The level to relieve these workings is drawing as quickly as possible but being extremely hard and poor we have been obliged to give a price per fathom in addition to the price per Bing”.*

In Midsummer 1817<sup>9</sup> Stagg informed the Court of further changes. He was conducting an experiment to ascertain whether it may not be, *“more advantageous in some parts of the vein to cut the whole of it by the fathom rather than the Bing.”*

William Willis in giving evidence before Dr Mitchell<sup>10</sup> said:

*“I am a miner, working under the London Lead Company. We are allowed £2 a-month, and settle once a-year and I consider that we earn on the average 12s. or 14s. a-week. We are paid by the fathom, and the price per cubic fathom, according to the nature of the work, is about £11. 4s. or £11. 5s. it has been as high as £11. 10s.”*

Both systems continued to be used but by 1864 it was reported by Robert Bainbridge to the Kinnaird Commission that three quarters of the company’s mines were now paid by the fathom. Stagg was continuously looking for ways in which to increase the productivity of the mines and in his report for Teesdale on Lady Day 1819<sup>11</sup> he described further alterations to the way in which bargains were to be given:

*“The practical agents who pass through the mines are unanimous in their opinion that the improvement is very decided, because besides affording the power of very materially increasing or diminishing the raising of ore as it may be required, without the slightest disadvantage, the workmen can by this mode make equal wages with six or eight shilling’s per Bing less price, which the quantities of ore now expected to raised at this mine (say 6 or 7,000 Bings per year) leaves an enormous saving. It will also tend in a great measure to equalise the wages of the miners, and to prevent the extravagant earnings of some of the partnerships, whilst others are earning little or nothing.*

*“The leading principle of the improvements is an allotment of a certain plot or square in the vein to each partnership which they cut around in the first instance, whereby the agents are enabled to judge with comparative certainty of the price that ought to be given and after cutting round the square the miners can work it with infinitely more ease and facility, and when more ore is required to be raised we have only to divide the squares into two or more compartments, which will at once double or treble the raising, or on the other hand, to throw two or three squares into one in order to reduce the raising in an equal degree, which in either of these cases the mine will continue to be wrought without the slightest alteration of principle or the least disadvantage. I fear*

*without a reference to the plans and a personal explanation of them, I may not be enabled to convey to the Court a concise idea of my meaning.*

*"I have made arrangements to work the whole of your mines in the same manner as we have got the levels up that are necessary for effecting it."*

The result of adopting this method was that whether working to raise Ore or carrying out Dead work the miners were paid for the number of cubic fathoms of material they dug which greatly helped the agents in calculating the amount to pay per bargain, it also removed to a degree the uncertainty for the miner as finding Ore, or not, did not affect their wages.

## **CHANGES TO THE LENGTH OF BARGAINS**

In 1820 an experimental change to the bargain period was made altering it to 3 of 4 months rather than 4 of 3 months, in 1821 this was made permanent.

In 1835 the bargain period for "Pickings" was extended to 4, 6 & 12 months.

A further alteration to the system is mentioned in the minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1830:

*"The list of Bargains having been taken into consideration by which it appears upon the 'Single Pair System' there has been a reduction of 190 men."*

Letters of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> June 1830, commented on the great advantage of the two men partnerships, and the Report of the visit by the Court in 1833 also commented on the great advantage of the system.<sup>12</sup>

One of the major changes that Robert Stagg made to the management of the mines was the introduction of Overmen. The General Index book of the Company states the following:—

*"Mr Stagg always held that the most important improvement he made in the management of the concern was the introduction of Mine Overmen taken from the ranks. Prior thereto, the mine workings were visited by an Agent very rarely, leaving the miners to play tricks, & take advantage of all kinds; but the daily and hourly inspection of Overmen puts a final close to all such, with an improved economy which scarcely admits of being fully estimated.*

*"As the Overmen too, are always selected from the best and most skilful workmen, great encouragement is thereby held out for general good conduct, by the hope of preferment; and what is of infinite moment, the less skilful miners are constantly put into more skilful modes of performing their work, by the daily oversight and instruction they receive from the overlookers; and not less is the benefit of having thus a body of men in full training for mine agencies; and also as effectual checks on all chance of partiality being shown in fixing the Bargain Rates; for when the opinions are given for each bargain by all the Agents and Overmen; partiality is out of the question, and it is equally out of question for any essential error being perpetuated either in the fixing those rates, or in undertaking improper new operations in the face of so searching, and so practical a mining council, as is thus formed each quarter by the union of the Agents of each District, and of the resident Overmen of the mine to be inspected, who together examine & report separately on every working in progress, or that is proposed as a fitting object for trial; as well as on the economy of and proper use of wood, and of every other material consumed in the mines; also generally as to the state of the repairs & good condition of the mines when thus viewed."*

This management method proved to be very effective and it enabled men to work through the ranks from miner to Overmen then onto agent. Evidence of this can be seen in the Company minutes for the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1863 which record that Thomas Davidson mine Overmen in Teesdale is appointed agent in Garrigill.

## **LENGTH OF SHIFTS**

Up until the mid-nineteenth century there was no restriction on the number of hours worked, most miners worked six to eight hours per day (LLC report Lady Day 1816 says the usual miners shift was 6 hours long and 5 shifts a week). By 1840 the miners were working 5 shifts of 8 hours a day.<sup>13</sup>

## **LENT MONEY, ANNUAL PAYS, AND MINERS DEBT**

Because there were long periods between pays an advance payment was made to the miners this was referred to as Lent money which was paid monthly by the London Lead Company.

The Mitchell Report<sup>14</sup> describes in detail how the lead miners account was kept in Northumberland, Durham & Cumberland:—

*“An account is opened against each miner, and he receives say 40s, which is called lent-money, on the first Friday in every month, which is entered against him. Also, if any tools be supplied him, or gunpowder, an entry is made against him. So also his quota of the expense of washing the ore. Then when the ore has been washed which the partnership have dug during the three months, the part of the money to which the miner is entitled is entered on the other side of the account to his credit. If the same partnership go on, then the proceedings of the second period of three months are the same as the first three months; and so it is with the third period of three months, and with the fourth period of three months. If the miner shall have entered into partnership with any other person it makes no difference in the manner of keeping his account; after the three months ore has been washed his proportion is put to his credit. Suppose that the miners year has terminated at Michaelmas, it will be some time before the ore shall all be washed, but when that shall have been accomplished the masters are now in a condition to make up his years amount. If the money which he has earned shall exceed the lent-money of £2 every month, and the other moneys chargeable against him, then there is a balance coming to him, and that is paid over. Some may receive £5 at such times, some £10, £15, or even £20 or £30. All depends on what is called his good luck. When any man has much to receive masters and men noise it abroad, and it tends to bring good character to the mine.*

*“But it may happen that, instead of having money to receive, the miner is found not to have earned as much as stands in the book against him. In that case the balance is struck, and entered against him in his next years account, and it may go on year after year; but if he shall in the course of time have a good year he may be able to extinguish all his debt, and even have something coming to him.”*

This Report<sup>15</sup> also points out that although a workman may be in debt to the Company this does not effect his monthly subsistence money, and that:

*“Such a thing as suing a miner for the balance due by him is totally unknown and all persons pity the poor man for his bad fortune.*

*“A miner will very rarely, scarcely ever, leave the mine in which he has been working, although there may be a debt standing against him and go to another master with*



whom he might open a clean account. Local attachment, and a regard to character, are security against such dishonourable conduct.”

The problem of miners being in debt to the Company was raised by the Kinnaird Commission<sup>16</sup>, when questioning Robert Bainbridge:—

“16,187. If a man gets into arrear, is that carried on into the next year?—Yes, we carry the balance on against him to the next year.

“16,188. (Mr. Austin Bruce.) The whole of it?—Yes, we always carry the whole of the balance on against him.

“16,189. (Chairman.) Does it often happen that there is a balance against a man?—No, no by means; decidedly the minor portion of our men have no balance; by far the larger proportion have a balance to receive at the end of the year.

“16,190. (Mr. Austin Bruce.) On what theory of wages are the bargains made; what is it expected that a man may fairly earn?—Our basis is 15s. a week clear, for five eight-hour shifts; but the basis fluctuates according to the state of the times, and according to the price of provisions.

“16,191. (Mr. Kendall.) If there is a balance against a man, is that carried on into the next year?—Yes, invariably.”

Evidence relating to the wages of the miners with examples of the off takes for Gunpowder etc., were given to the Commission.<sup>17</sup>

### LEAD COMPANY DUE PAPERS in year ending October 1863

#### Example 1.

	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Earnings of A.B. and 3 partners					<b>258</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
7 qr. Barrels of gunpowder at 14s. 6d.	5	1	6				
31 doz. Lb. candles at 6s. 10d.	10	11	10				
Tools	0	3	7				
Drawing 256 4/6 shifts at 4s.	51	6	8				
Cash, labourers	3	15	0				
Balance due to each partner:							
£    s.    d.							
1    7    0	Cash, A.B.	45	2	0			
16   13   11	Cash, C.D.	28	12	0			
18    3   11	Cash, E.F.	28	12	0			
16   13   11	Cash, G.H.	28	12	0			
	School, A.B.	0	7	0	0		
<u>    52   18    9</u>	Funds, C.D. and G.H.	3	0	0			
		<u>205</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>			
				Due	<b>52</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>9</b>

#### Example 2

	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Earnings of I.K. and 3 partners					<b>168</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>
14 qr. Barrels of gunpowder at 14s. 6d.	10	3	0				
24 doz. Lb. candles at 6s. 10d.	8	4	0				
Tools	1	7	4				
Drawing 66 shifts at 4s.	13	4	0				
Cash labourers	3	8	0				

Balance due to each partner

£	s.	d.						
6	18	0	Cash, I.K.	26	2	2		
5	11	1	Cash, L.M.	27	4	1		
5	11	1	Cash, N.O.	27	9	1		
3	6	1	Cash, P.Q.	29	14	1		
			Rent, L.M.	0	5	0		
<u>21</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>		<u>147</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>	Due	<u>21 6 3</u>

An interesting insight to the Company attitude to the setting of the miners wages is given in a letter dated 11<sup>th</sup> November 1816 to the Court from Robert Stagg:—

*“Taking advantage of the depressed state of the Lead Trade, We have been enabled thereby to reduce the wages to a degree which would have been utterly impossible under more prosperous circumstances, and it will be my care to prevent an undue increase in better times; the workmen have also been forced into a very sensible improvement of their moral habits; Drunkenness (the Miners prevailing Sin) is comparatively abolished amongst them and those lavish & extravagant habits, induced by their former high wages are in a great degree corrected.”*

The annual pays from the point of view of the mine owners was very useful as it allowed them time to raise the amount of money needed. With a fluctuating lead market, the lead was frequently stockpiled rather than sold in the hope of getting a higher price; this could mean that for long periods the Companies would have very little income. The amounts paid out could be exceedingly large, the minutes for the London Lead Company of the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1826 record that, Mr Stagg had taken up £28,000 for the annual pays in the north.

This money had to be transported considerable distances the Court Minutes of 11th July 1793<sup>18</sup> state:—

*“We the Committee appointed by the special court the 18th April 1793 to consider if any and what alterations can be made for the benefit of the Company in their mode of making their payments in the North and report their opinion at the next special quarterly Court. Do report that after mature consideration are unanimously of opinion very material alterations may be made for the benefit of the Company in the mode of taking cash from Newcastle for making the pays in Alston Moor by the Company’s agent going to Newcastle monthly and the sum to be limited which will do away with the risk the Company are now subject by preventing so large a balance resting in the hands of their agent at Alston.”*

The minutes of 2nd June 1795<sup>19</sup> stated that *“Robert Stagg and Thomas Dodd do always accompany Thomas Hall (Company Cashier) to Newcastle when money is wanted by him to make advances and pays, and if Thomas Hall should find going to Newcastle to great a fatigue, the Robert Stagg and Thomas Dodd to go without him.”*

To give some perspective of the equivalent value of £28,000 in 1826 compared to 2017, a historic standard of living calculator using the retail price index gives it as £2,240,000, using average earnings the value in 2017 is £22,800,000.<sup>20</sup>

The carriage of such large amounts of money by the agents must have been a worrying if not hazardous job. There is no indication as to them having armed escorts or of any other security measures, yet neither is there any record of attempted robbery.

In a memoir of Robert Stagg<sup>21</sup> it is stated that in 1815 he arranged *“with the Newcastle Bankers in to have their note, in exchange for the Company’s Bills, delivered at*

*Stanhope Castle (the then residence of the Cashier) "Whereby the risk of conveyance is done away – the superintendent will have at least 30 days in each year to devote to the services which these journeys occupied – travelling not less than 700 miles in the year, attended by an Agent whose time is most material elsewhere, besides the expense of the journeys."*

The mine owners also felt that the system benefited the workmen, as it prevented them having too much money in their hands at one time and therefore prevented them squandering the money, also it could act as a savings scheme. In the 1864 report Robert Bainbridge stated that he thought it beneficial that they should be paid annually because:

*"It comes to meet those annually accruing charges which they cannot escape, and our retaining the money in our own hands I believe is better than if they had it in their pockets, in many cases."* He also said that the men used the extra money on buying cows, and in building cottages.

The method of payment of miners by some companies was not necessarily to the long term benefit of the men, in that one man would be given the money and they would all then go to the nearest public house to split it, leading to the men drinking a great deal of their wages. In 1795 on the 6<sup>th</sup> October the London Lead Company minutes record a change in their method of payment as well as laying down clear rules as to how it was to be done:

*"... following the visit of Mr Hagen and Mr Warner to the North the following resolutions were agreed.*

*"That the Company's pays in the North which used to be paid half yearly be in future paid once every year at Michaelmas and that no one be paid for but what is washed and weighed up, and none sent but with a printed ticket of the quantity from the mine to the mill.*

*"That the monthly advance money and also what becomes due to them be paid to themselves and no other person, in money and not in any kind of Bank notes nor any trades people attend pay; nor to any order written or otherwise, except the miner is ill and cannot attend himself."*

The instructions to the agents was that they were to make their pays at the Company offices, there had been an exception in that the workmen at Egglestone had been paid at the Inn but in 1825 the instruction was that the:

*"Pays to be made at the company office at Middleton; & to discontinue making them at the Inn at Egglestone."*<sup>22</sup>

In doing this the Lead Companies were far ahead of the rest of the country. It was only in 1831 that an act was passed prohibiting the payment of wages in anything but coins of the realm; and it was not until 1883 that an act was passed prohibiting the payment of wages in a public house.

In 1795 the lent money was 10s 6d<sup>23</sup>, in around 1800 this was increased to 30s. In the report of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1815 for Teesdale<sup>24</sup> Thomas Dodd expressed his concern that:

*"The Workmen's earnings during the last half year have been very moderate indeed, so much so that a further moderation in the wages cannot be made under any circumstances. Nor indeed can they be continued so low unless the price of provisions is very moderate, as the earnings during the half year according to the last calculation we can make will not average more than at the rate of from £30 to £35 per year for each man which is really less than they can live upon."*

Yet Again in his Midsummer report of 1816 Robert Stagg expressed his concern that the bargains had been let at such a low rate, that many of the miners would not earn the amount equal to their monthly advance of 30s. There had always been a concern that if the monthly advance was too great then at the annual pays the men would receive little or nothing and end up in debt to the Company.

### **FACTORS EFFECTING MONTHLY ADVANCES**

In 1816 the amount of the monthly advance was raised from 30s to 40s at which level it remained until 1854 when it was increased to 44s, in a Court ruling on the 14th September, to come into effect on the 31st October. By 1872 this had been increased to 51s 6d and on the 14<sup>th</sup> May 1872 the minutes show that the court increased the wages by a further 2s 6d so making the subsistence money 54s per month. Thomas Watson the underground agent explained to the 1864 Commission that when the young men went into the mines they received 35s a month during the first quarter; and from the end of the first quarter until they were 21 years of age, or until they were 20, they usually got £2 a month from the age of 20 to 21 years, £2 4s for two out of every three months, and £2 the third month. The London Lead Company had a philanthropic approach and in setting wages took the miners social needs into account. They were forced to alter this approach when the fall in the price of lead in the late twenties involved it in heavy operating losses. In 1825 the price of lead was £25 10s, this fell to £18 10s in 1827 and £13 10s in 1830 (actual prices per Fother obtained by the LLC); and it remained low for several years. A reduction in wage rates was introduced in 1827 with further cuts later. In 1831 the average weekly earnings in all the Company's mines came to no more than 9s 10d. On Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1831, the Court instructed Robert Stagg to change the method of subsistence payments.

*"The monthly advances to Pickmen in regular divisions and places be continued at the rate of ten shillings per week so long as they use due diligence and conduct themselves satisfactorily.*

*"The advances for old pickings to be confined to the actual earnings as near as the same can be ascertained as heretofore."*

Worse for the mining districts was a reduction in the Company's labour force from 1,057 miners in 1829 to 574 in 1833<sup>25</sup>. On Thursday the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1832 the Lead Company minutes record:—

*"The Governor reported that during the last year they had to contend not only with extremely depressed markets but an unusually small demand for lead. He reported that there had been a considerable reduction in their annual expenditure, but that it is essential that the Company continue to open new ground undertaking trials for new veins, and that with the present low rate of labour intends to push these trials to termination.*

*"Every practicable reduction has been made in the rate of wages but the Court cannot feel insensible to the increased and severe distress that would arise from the sudden dismissal of a large number of their workmen who have served the Company satisfactorily in more prosperous times and who it is but fair to state have submitted to the necessary privations with a meritorious degree of patience and contentment.*

*"The large supplies of lead furnished by the Spanish and other foreign mines have so interfered with the British Export Trade, that it is to be apprehended much increase in the price of lead cannot be expected while these supplies continue."*

From 1836 to 1847 the average wage was 12s 6d, then in 1849 this was reduced to 12s because of a fall in the price of lead, and food prices. In the early 1850's there was considerable unrest especially as miners working at the Beaumont mines were receiving 15s, and miners started to leave the Company's service. In 1854 their earnings were increased to 15s. In the boom years of the seventies the wages of the miners of the London Lead Company averaged around 22s.

It should be emphasised that the lead companies were very careful to try and control the actual wages that the men received, especially in the later years (much easier to achieve when the men worked by the fathom). The aim being to ensure the men earned their subsistence money and a little over despite the impression given of partnerships being in a position if lucky to "strike it rich". Examples of this can be found in the Court minutes. On the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1802, the Court wrote to Thomas Dodd asking to know why the Bargains should be so much advanced; he wrote that although the price per bargain may seem high it only makes the workmen 12s per week. On the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1854, the Court resolved that the miners wages be fixed on the basis of allowing them to earn 15s per week; and on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1878, it was resolved that the basis of wages for underground men be reduced to 16s per week.

## **DOWNTURN IN THE LEAD MARKET**

During the 1860's there was a marked down turn in the prosperity of the Lead Company which was clearly stated in the minutes of Tuesday the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1868. In the report which they made to the Proprietors in March 1867 they referred to:

*"the dullness of the lead trade in common with all other branches of commerce from the commencement of their current financial year November 1866, and the continuance of the universal stagnation of trade since that period is so well known that the Proprietors cannot be surprised to learn that the profits of this Company have been correspondingly affected".*

In the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> October 1866 the sales effected by the Company were not quite equal to the produce from the mines within the year, but the average price obtained from the sales during that year was good, and the result of the years operations under all circumstances satisfactory, but in the following year however, ending 31<sup>st</sup> October 1867 the amount of their total sales was only about two thirds of the produce of that year, and these sales could only be effected at a reduction on previous prices.

*"Since the beginning of the current year a somewhat better tone has prevailed and up to the present time, the Court have been enabled to sell a fair quantity of lead but they have been obliged to submit to a reduction in their prices below those of last year."*

In the report of Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> March 1869, once again the Company was shown to be doing badly. *"The ore raised amounted to 23,821 Bings being about equal to 6,600 tons of lead, and the sales effected 6,045 tons but the prices obtained show a very great reduction on previous years.*

*"The average of the year referred to being £19 11s 4d a ton against £21 10s 11d in 1867 and £20 16s 6d as the medium of 5 years 1863/67. This falling off in the value of our own produce is a very serious matter as to a certain extent it must be attributed to the fact that of the late years many of the principle lead merchants have increased their own refining operations and with the scientific improvements which have been introduced many ores are being used for the manufacture of White lead which formerly would have been rejected."*

The Lead Merchants were able to import cheap foreign lead and refine it themselves rather than buying from the UK producers, so greatly reducing the demand for the Company's lead. The improved methods of producing White Lead which was used in paint production meant that poorer quality lead could be used. Previously only high quality lead could be used as impurities greatly effected the quality of the end product. This change also resulted in a reduced demand for high quality lead and therefore a corresponding drop in price.

In the late 1870's the market for English lead collapsed, with the importation of foreign lead at a price that English mine owners could not match. Even in 1866 Wallace<sup>26</sup> comments on the amount of Spanish lead being imported, "*... it appears that the amount of Spanish lead imported into the country during three recent years was 99,000, 124,000 and 186,000 tons respectively. The Spanish mines are not deep and the best workmen are paid low wages. It is impossible to obtain lead from the greatly exhausted mines in Alston Moor to compete in price with the Spanish lead raised from rich mines at much less cost of labour*"

Year	Price of lead per ton			Year	Price of lead per ton		
1866	£23	10s	0d	1876	£23	5s	8d
1867	£23	0s	0d	1877	£21	18s	17d
1868	£21	0s	0d	1878	£18	12s	8d
1869	£19	15s	0d	1879	£14	15s	10d
1870	£21	0s	0d	1880	£17	2s	11½d
1871	£21	10s	0d	1881	£14	17s	3½d
1872	£23	0s	0d	1882	£14	15s	2d
1873	£25	0s	0d	1883	£13	0s	0d
1874	£23	10s	0d	1884	£11	7s	6d
1875	£23	12s	4½d	1885	£11	7s	6d

The figures above show the rapid decline in the price of lead, these prices being the best price for a Ton of Refined lead obtained by the Lead Company in each given year. The minutes of Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1878 give a good indication of the company's problem:

*"The Committee of accounts wish to call the attention of the Court to the fact that the demands for money in the North up to the present time have been nearly equal to the corresponding period of last year, though no material increase has taken place in the quantity of lead raised. And the price of lead has fallen on an average about £3 per Ton, and to the consequent necessity of reducing the expenditure of the Company as much as possible."*

## WAGE VARIATION BETWEEN MINING COMPANIES

Not all of the mining Companies paid the same wages, the report of Dr Mitchell pointed this out:<sup>27</sup>

*"The average earnings of the miners working in the mines of Colonel Beaumont have for some years varied from 14s. 6d. to 15s 4d. per week per man. These mines are considered as having turned out well for some years past. The agent of the London Lead Company considered that the men working in their mines got on the average from 12s. to 15s. a-week. Some of the men themselves have estimated the average at from 12s. to 14s. and some at 12s. 6d.; but it is impossible for poor men to form an opinion, except from the experience of their*

*own mine, or one or two more in their vicinity. The men of the London Lead Company have many advantages besides their wages...”*

These advantages were described by Robert Walton Bainbridge the London Lead Company General Mining Agent in his evidence to Dr Mitchell:<sup>28</sup>

*“We have medical men employed and paid by the Company, and medical attendance and medicine are afforded to the workmen and their families without charge. This includes accouchements as well.”* he went on to describe the provision of schools, Sunday schools, and libraries, as well as provision of housing:

*“The Company have at Middleton and Nenthead some cottages with gardens attached, which are let at a low rental to some of the most meritorious workmen.”* The workmen also had the benefit of the Working Men’s Fund, in evidence to the Kinnaird Commission<sup>29</sup>, given by Robert Bainbridge he stated the sick allowance was, 7s a week, the pensions at the age of 65 was 6s, and if the husband died, £1 was allowed for funeral expenses and £3 was paid to the widow; also that the benefits applied to those working above ground as well as those working below, and that all paid the same amount to the fund.

In many ways it is difficult to compare the wages of those working for the Governor and Company and other mining concerns due to the additional benefits that they received. The provision of cheap grain in times of hardship must also be taken into consideration, the development of the Corn Associations (an early cooperative system) In 1841 the Court urged the miners to form their own Corn Association, promising to give it aid; this was done and proved to be very successful. The workmen bought the corn in bulk at Newcastle; the company using their system of carriers then transported this for them. The mill at Tynebottom was handed over to their management, and everyone was able get their corn ground there for just the cost of the grinding of the corn to flour<sup>30</sup>.

## **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

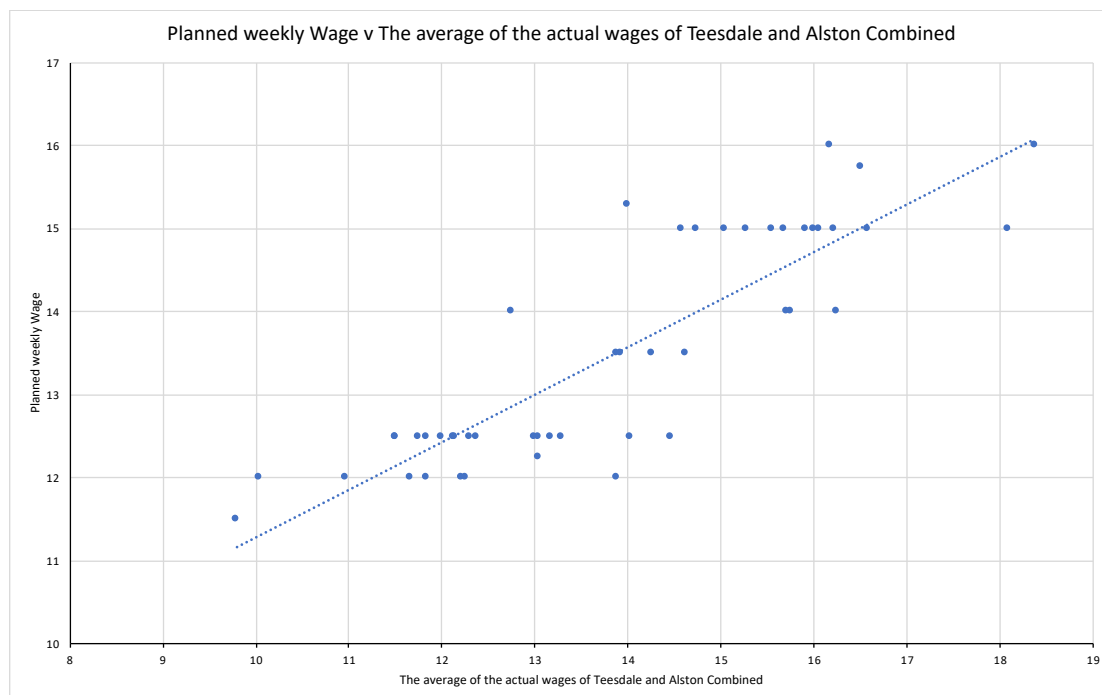
It is unfortunate that records giving the actual wages paid to the miners of this Company are unavailable, those records that do exist state the bargain rates, the amount due to a partnership for the ground cut or amount of ore raised, but give no indication of the numbers in a partnership or the money earned after payment for gunpowder etc. The General Index Book of the Company does give the Company “Planned Weekly Basis” which was fixed every year for the period 1822 to 1868 (not continuous) and the weekly average earnings that were paid to the miners from 1821 to 1876. Using this information it is possible to see if the planned weekly basis was achieved, and to determine if there was any correlation between wages and lead prices.

The hypothesis tested are:

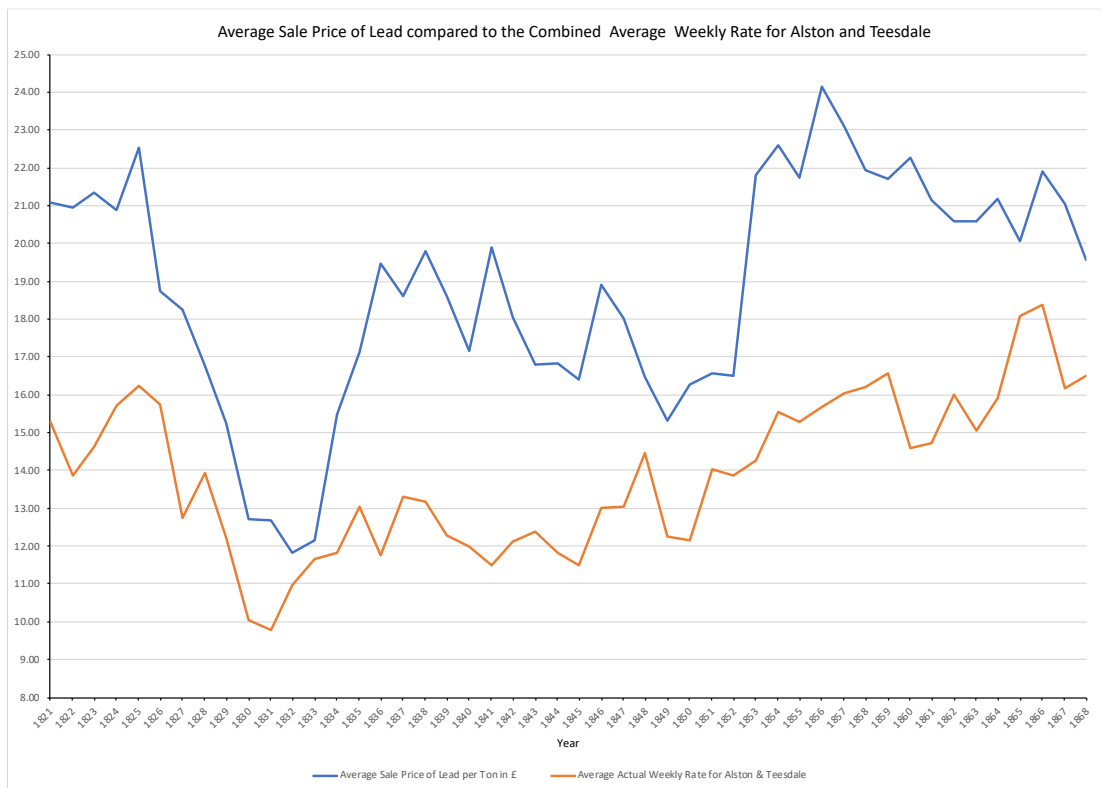
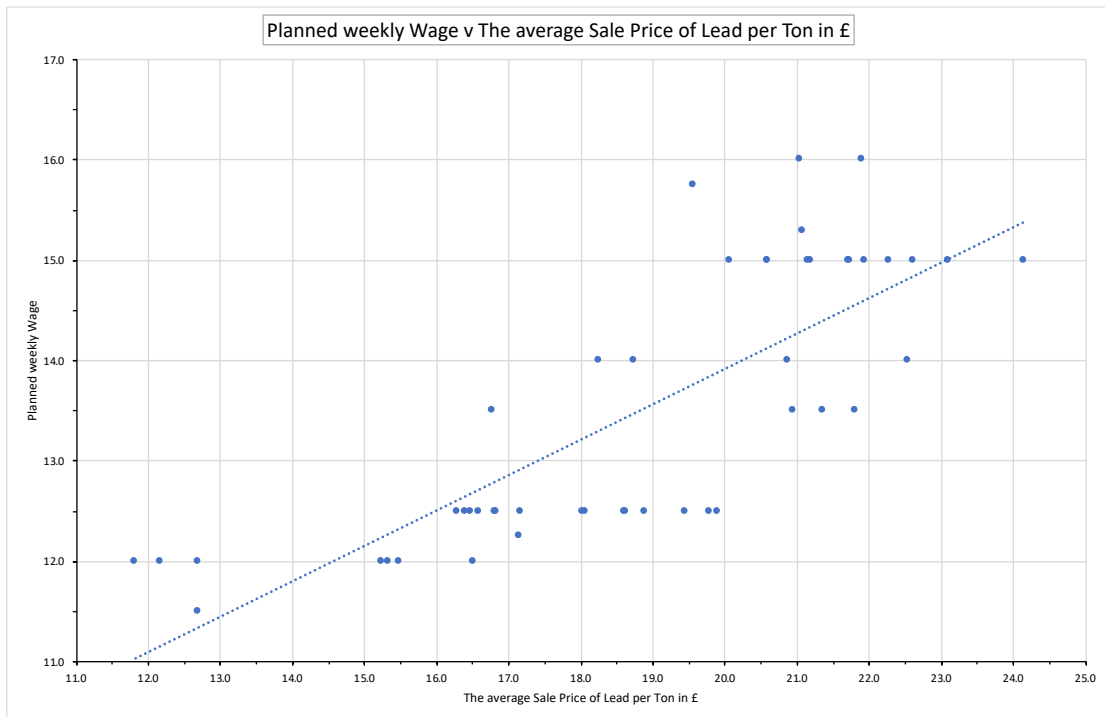
- That there is a positive correlation between the Company’s planned weekly wage and the average wages obtained by the miners in Alston and Teesdale districts.
- That there is a positive correlation between the Company’s planned weekly wage and the average price the Company obtained for their lead per Ton.
- That there is a positive correlation between the average wages obtained by the miners in Alston and Teesdale districts and the average price the Company obtained for their lead per Ton.

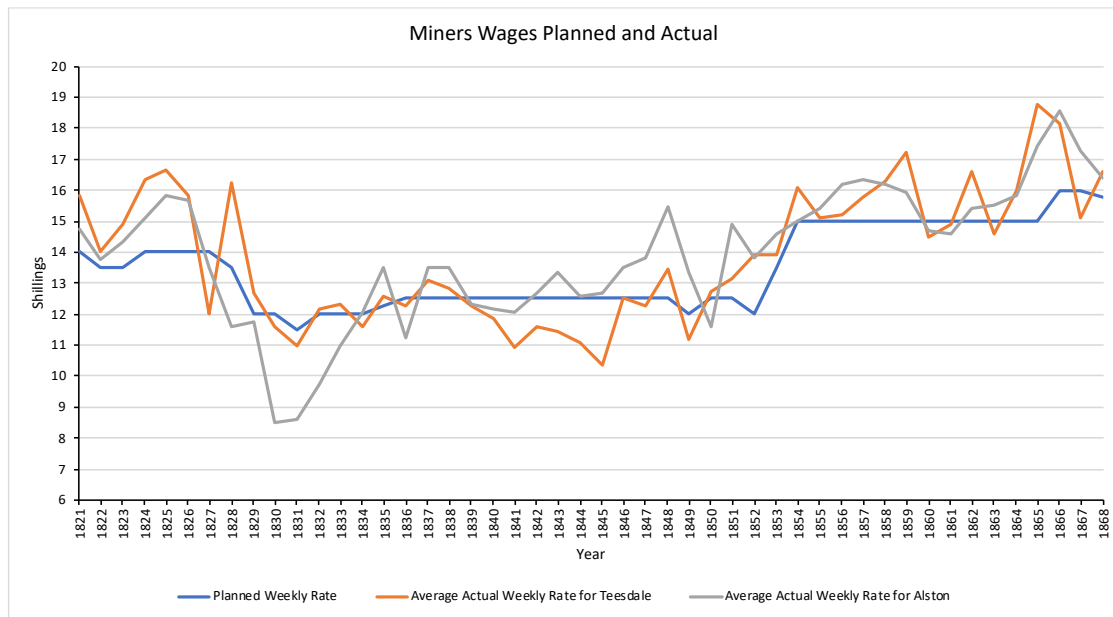
These hypothesis were tested using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and Pearson's correlation coefficient, the results are summarised below. It would appear that the proposed hypothesis were all true.

Test	Spearman RCC	Pearson Correlation	Significant at 95%
Planned weekly Wage v The average of the actual wages of Teesdale and Alston Combined	0.8571	0.8776	Yes
Planned weekly Wage v Average Weekly Wage for Alston Miners	0.8363	0.8195	Yes
Planned weekly Wage v Average Weekly Wage for Teesdale Miners	0.7814	0.8345	Yes
Planned weekly Wage v Average Price obtained for a Ton of Lead	0.8489	0.7922	Yes
Average Weekly Wage at Alston v Average Price obtained for a Ton of Lead	0.7469	0.7857	Yes
Average Weekly Wage at Teesdale v Average Price obtained for a Ton of Lead	0.6922	0.6738	Yes
Average of the Combined Weekly Wage at Alston & Teesdale v Average Price obtained for a Ton of Lead	0.7646	0.7747	Yes









**David McAnelly**  
**21<sup>st</sup> July 2018**

<sup>1</sup> Mine Accounts Rampgill and Scaleburn mine. D/Wal/21. Cumbria Record Office Carlisle.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Conditions in mines to which the provisions of the Acts 23 and 24 do not apply with reference to the health and safety of persons employed 1864, Epitome of Evidence. Kinnaird Report.

<sup>4</sup> London Lead Company Report Book 1806 – 1820. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 40.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Conditions in mines to which the provisions of the Acts 23 and 24 do not apply with reference to the health and safety of persons employed 1864, Epitome of Evidence. Kinnaird Report.

<sup>7</sup> London Lead Company Court Minutes volume 17. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 17.

<sup>8</sup> London Lead Company Report Book 1806 – 1820. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Children's Employment Commission 1842. Report by James Mitchell

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The General Index book of the Governor & Company

<sup>13</sup> Children's Employment Commission 1842. Report by James Mitchell

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Conditions in mines to which the provisions of the Acts 23 and 24 do not apply with reference to the health and safety of persons employed 1864. Epitome of Evidence. Kinnaird Report.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> London Lead Company Court Minutes 1795. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 14.

<sup>19</sup> London Lead Company Court Minutes 1795. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 15.

<sup>20</sup> Measuring Worth.com

<sup>21</sup> The General Index book of the Governor & Company

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> London Lead Company Court Minutes 1795. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 15.

<sup>24</sup> London Lead Company Report Book 1806 – 1820. Library of N.E.I.M.M.E., LLC 40.

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- <sup>25</sup> A History of Lead Mining in the Pennines. A. Raistrick & B. Jennings. 1989.
- <sup>26</sup> Alston Moor Its Pastoral People, Its Mines and Miners. William Wallace. 1890.
- <sup>27</sup> Children's Employment Commission 1842. Report by James Mitchell
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid
- <sup>29</sup> Conditions in mines to which the provisions of the Acts 23 and 24 do not apply with reference to the health and safety of persons employed 1864. Epitome of Evidence. Kinnaird Report.
- <sup>30</sup> Two Centuries of Industrial Welfare: The London (Quaker) Lead Company 1692 – 1905. A. Raistrick 1988

N.E.I.M.M.E. - North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers.